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By-Hickel, Raymond A.

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A study of bilingualism among third-generation Americans of French-Canadian extraction briefly examines their linguistic superiority in French over monolingual students and appraises the appropriate psychological approaches to teaching this special group. The article suggests that an "educated standard French" be presented as an alternative to rather than a substitute for the "home accent," an alternative used for international communication. Suggestions are made for building on the established language foundation by emphasizing phonetics and by enriching vocabulary, grammar, and cultural studies. (DS)

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TEACHING FRENCH TO FRANCO-AMERICANS

A controversial problem, as candidly seen by

Raymond A. Hickel

This is a delicate problem that needs to be tactfully handled by everyone concerned. Most Franco-Americans now at high school level belong to a third generation and the situation at home is not necessarily the same for everyone. Most of them rightly consider that English is their natural national language, but they are still exposed to "Canadian French" at home and/or with their grandparents and older relatives. Religious and linguistic backgrounds are often intimately tied together - though not necessarily.

Nevertheless, their exposure to French from early childhood makes them naturally bilingual. Even if they are not fluent in French, even if their French has been "contaminated" by Americanisms, even if the flavor of their accent is

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not "standard modern French" - they cannot be considered beginners. They have an early acquired "sense of the language" and therefore a linguistic superiority over monolingual students. It is an asset on which they should be encouraged to capitalize instead of trying to forget that they are "different" because social pressures have it that a non-Yankee background is something to be more or less ashamed of. They should think of themselves as one of the country's major resources in language teachers, employees in foreign projects, etc. Whenever possible, a special group of such students should be set to work apart from real beginners - for their own good and to avoid discouragement among the monolingual students.

It would in many cases do justice to Francophones to give them a test after one year of "French Special" - or whatever name could be found for their program - toward a certain number of "credits." Then they could choose other subjects - having fulfilled the minimum college requirements - or carry on in literature and civilization at a higher level for further credits - or study another language such as Spanish, Russian, German or Latin.

If the number of Francophones is not sufficient to allow for a special course it could be found expedient to group them as a special section of French I or French II and give them special assignments. Let them feel neither superior nor inferior in any respect, but "different" linguistically.

Since they have already acquired the basic skills of understanding and speaking from early childhood, emphasis should be placed at the beginning on phonetics. One way of convincing them tactfully of such a necessity is this: let them listen to announcers of Radio-Montreal or other French-speaking radio stations easily picked up on any good receiver throughout New Hampshire, and compare the accentless "standard" French they will hear with the equally accentless French of a good educated "native speaker" via some good recording. Then, let them listen to more or less famous voices from both Canada and France, all flavored by idiosyncrasies of various regional accents. This might convince them that there is nothing wrong in having a "home" accent as part of one's personality - but that for the sake of international communication between Canadian, French, Belgians, Swiss, Tahitians and Madagascan citizens, not to mention many others, there is an "educated standard French" that is taught to all these different people, and will be taught them as well.

The misleading and offensive expression "Parisian French" should be avoided. It is inaccurate and unpalatable to forty million French natives anyway.

Once the psychological problem has been solved, half the battle is won. Needless to say, tapes and an intelligent use of the language lab will help win the other half. Special materials will be helpful. Such materials are being prepared. Interested persons should contact Mr. Elphege Roy, at Manchester High School West.

Vocabulary can be enriched by making full use of Canadian radio and TV (in the areas of the North where such Video broadcasts are available at the cost of an extra antenna), films with a French sound-track, a review of the other subjects being studied conducted in French, with the help of handbooks written in French and published in the United States, Canada, France, Switzerland, or Belgium. Students can be provided with French-speaking magazines and asked to report in French to the others about one particular article, etc.

Grammar can be taught in the same spirit as it is taught in French-speaking countries, where grammatical and logical analyses are usually mastered by 10-year old students in elementary schools. However, frequent recourse to pattern-practice is advocated. Dictations followed by questions are recommended. Questions may be half grammatical, half of the "comprehension" type. They are the natural introduction to the teaching of composition (a French "dissertation" is not prepared or presented as an English "essay."). Teachers can find helpful hints in school handbooks, published for French-speaking countries.

Civilization and Literature can be approached by means of discussing excerpts from various writers, journalists, etc. ("explications de texte"). A valid approach to civilization could be to start with an evaluation of the French heritage in countries other than metropolitan France - including, of course, Canada and Louisiana, but in the general world context. Then, the logical next step is to study the evolution of institutions, ways of life, manners, etc., in France itself - with many illustrations from literature and other arts. French contributions to sciences and the advance of modern techniques can be studied by personal inquiries and reports, if the school library is well provided.

The spirit of such teaching is not to indulge in senseless propaganda, but to help our students to realize that the French have engaged in other activities than chopping off Kings' heads and selling champagne, and that they have contributed their fair share towards the progress of mankind, including the highest ideals of democracy.

Franco-Americans ought to be encouraged to correspond in French with pen pals in other French-speaking countries all over the world and in France in particular, not only to hear from them about their ways of life, but better to explain to them who and what they are, and why they are proud to be Americans.